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UNCLAS DHAKA 000917

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: Opposition announces agitation plans

1. (U) On March 2, opposition Awami league (AL) and its leftist allies announced a month-long agitation aimed at ouster of the BNP government. The agitation plans announced by AL president Sheikh Hasina include 'no confidence human walls' at all 64 district headquarters on March 13 and at upazila or sub-district headquarters on March 20, a dawn-to-dusk nationwide general strike or 'hartal' on March 27, rallies in industrial belts from April 2-4 in support of the workers' demands for job security and higher wages, and support of a labor organization's call for a 48-hour industrial strike on April 5-6.

2. (U) Addressing a huge rally in downtown Dhaka, Hasina asked party activists to form 'action committees' in their respective neighborhoods to carry out the agitation programs in a renewed attempt to unseat the 'failed' government. She accused the BNP government of harboring Islamic extremists and the PM and her family of amassing ill-gotten wealth and challenged them to test their popularity by calling early elections.

3. (SBU) According to an AL organizing secretary, Hasina announced "soft" programs of agitation in a shift from her hard stance on the oust-government campaign. He said Hasina used the school exams, scheduled to begin from March 10, as an excuse not to call hartals for long durations as she has started focusing more on the next general election campaigns than on agitation. He believes Hasina is shifting from hartal-centered political actions to programs like human chains and rallies that draw bigger crowds. (Note: AL observed eight days of countrywide hartals from January 29 to February 15. End note) An AL presidium member, however, told Pol FSN that Hasina has been erratic in setting the pace of the anti-government agitation.

4. (SBU) Comment: The ineffectiveness and wide indifference to the AL's recent strikes in mid-February following the murder of former Finance Minister Kibria and a growing displeasure within the business community over frequent calls for disruptive programs no doubt plays a role in reducing the emphasis on strikes in the new package of agitation. However, without a viable alternative and with any momentum lost following the Kibria killing, the AL can only continue its programs of street political actions and hope the BNP government over reacts, perhaps sparking some popular support for the AL cause. End Comment.

THOMAS